

**United States Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Royal Gorge Field Office  
3028 E. Main Street  
Cañon City, CO 81212**

## **Environmental Assessment**

**Sangre de Cristo Electric Association  
Powerline ROW Amendment and Renewal**

DOI-BLM-CO-F02-2013-0026 EA

October, 2014



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## **CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 IDENTIFYING INFORMATION**

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER (optional): COC-36854

PROJECT TITLE: SDCEA Powerline ROW Renewal & Amendment

PLANNING UNIT:

LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

Sixth Principal Meridian, Colorado

T. 22 S., R. 71 W.,

sec. 16, lot 1, W1/2NE1/4 and W1/2SE1/4;

sec. 17, unsurveyed Sunbeam Lode in SW1/4;

sec. 20, N1/2NE1/4 and N1/2NW1/4;

sec. 21, lot 49 and 68;

M.S. Nos. 146A, 176A, 239 and 240.

T. 23 S., R. 71 W.,

sec. 4, SW1/4NE1/4.

APPLICANT: Sangre de Cristo Electric Association

### **1.2 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

BACKGROUND: This EA has been prepared by the BLM to analyze a right-of-way (ROW) application from Sangre de Cristo Electric Association (SDCEA) for the renewal and amendment of an existing distribution powerline in Custer County, CO, authorized under serial number COC-36854. The proposed action is located approximately 6 miles east of Silver Cliff, CO, south of CO Highway 96. This powerline serves many of the residences in Querida and Rosita, CO, and was originally constructed in the 1930s. A portion of this powerline located in Section 16 has poles that were determined to be rotten below ground level and require replacement.

The proposed action specifically is: 1) to amend COC-36854 to include authorizations for 20 foot wide access routes that are used to inspect and maintain the existing powerline; 2) to reconstruct a portion of the existing overhead powerline in Section 16, replacing existing wooden poles with taller, stronger wooden poles; and 3) renew the authorization for COC-36854 for an additional 30-year term.

### **1.3 PURPOSE AND NEED**

The purpose of this BLM action is to process a ROW application submitted by SDCEA requesting the amendment and renewal of an existing overhead powerline ROW grant to include authorization of 20 foot wide access routes and the reconstruction of a portion of the existing overhead powerline. The need of the BLM is to address the provisions of Title V of the Federal

Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), as amended (43 U.S.C. 1761) and the Royal Gorge Field Office Resource Management Plan (RMP), May 13, 1996, to respond to the request for rights-of-way on a case-by-case basis.

## **1.4 DECISION TO BE MADE**

The BLM will decide whether to approve the proposed SDCEA overhead powerline amendment and renewal project based on the analysis contained in this Environmental Assessment (EA). This EA will analyze the reconstruction of a section of the existing overhead powerline in T. 22 S., R. 71 W., sec. 16; the inclusion of 20 foot wide access routes for the purpose of inspection and maintenance; and the renewal of powerline grant COC-36854. The BLM may choose to: a) accept the project as proposed, b) accept the project with modifications/mitigation, c) accept an alternative to the proposed action, or d) not authorize the project at this time. The finding associated with this EA may not constitute the final approval for the proposed action.

## **1.5 PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW**

**PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW:** The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

**Name of Plan:** Royal Gorge Resource Management Plan, Record of Decision

**Date Approved:** May 13, 1996

**Decision Number/Page:** C-115

**Decision Language:** Allow local purpose powerlines, pipelines, communication lines and sites, and other types of rights-of-way only when a clear need is demonstrated, and the beneficial environmental effects outweigh the costs.

In January 1997, the Colorado State Office of the BLM approved the Standards for Public Land Health and amended all RMPs in the State. Standards describe the conditions needed to sustain public land health and apply to all uses of public lands.

**Standard 1:** Upland soils exhibit infiltration and permeability rates that are appropriate to soil type, climate, land form, and geologic processes.

**Standard 2:** Riparian systems associated with both running and standing water function properly and have the ability to recover from major disturbance such as fire, severe grazing, or 100-year floods.

**Standard 3:** Healthy, productive plant and animal communities of native and other desirable species are maintained at viable population levels commensurate with the species and habitat's potential.

Standard 4: Special status, threatened and endangered species (federal and state), and other plants and animals officially designated by the BLM, and their habitats are maintained or enhanced by sustaining healthy, native plant and animal communities.

Standard 5: The water quality of all water bodies, including ground water where applicable, located on or influenced by BLM lands will achieve or exceed the Water Quality Standards established by the State of Colorado.

Because standards exist for each of these five categories, a finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis. These findings are located in Chapter 3 of this document.

## **1.6 SCOPING, PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND ISSUES**

**1.5.1 Scoping:** NEPA regulations (40 CFR §1500-1508) require that the BLM use a scoping process to identify potential significant issues in preparation for impact analysis. The principal goals of scoping are to allow public participation to identify issues, concerns, and potential impacts that require detailed analysis.

Persons/Public/Agencies Consulted: Scoping, by posting this project on the Royal Gorge Field Office NEPA website, was the primary mechanism used by the BLM to initially identify issues.

Issues Identified: No issues were identified during public scoping.

## **CHAPTER 2 - PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide information on the Proposed Action and Alternatives. Alternatives considered but not analyzed in detail are also discussed.

### **2.2 ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED IN DETAIL**

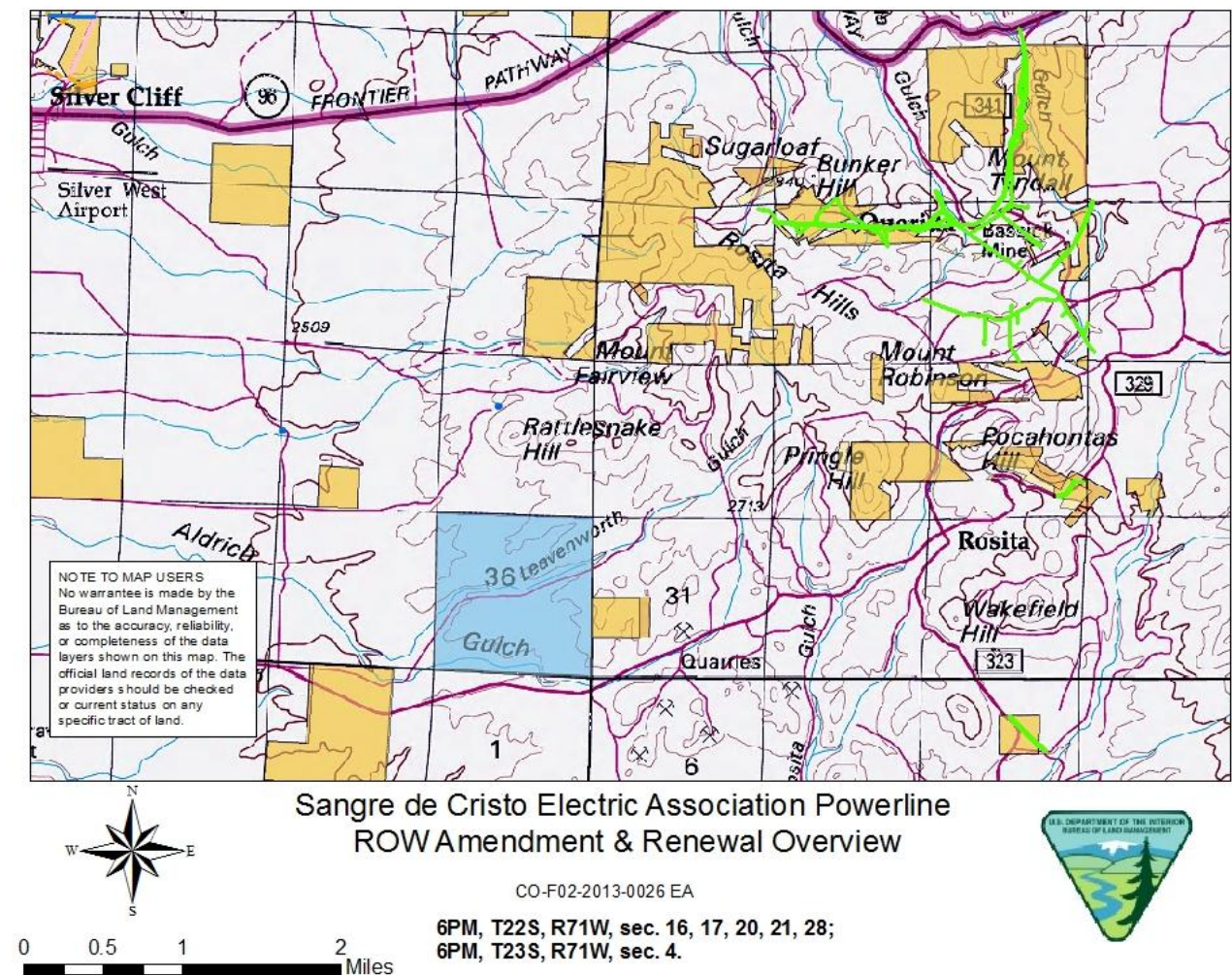
#### **2.2.1 Proposed Action**

The proposed action is to renew an existing 20-foot wide overhead powerline ROW for SDCEA under serial number COC-36854; amend the existing grant to include 20-foot wide access routes across public lands for the inspection and maintenance of existing overhead powerlines; and reconstruct a portion of the existing overhead powerline in Section 16 within the boundaries of the ROW.

Authorization of two types of access routes is included in the proposed action and includes authorization of existing roads crossing public lands that may require routine maintenance, and authorization of routes across the existing landscape that will not be maintained or improved. Maintenance of existing roads may include upkeep and repair of the graded or natural surface, including upkeep and repair of existing culverts, cattle guards, drainage facilities and hardened crossings. Existing roads and routes within the powerline ROW itself will be used primarily for routine visual inspection of the powerlines. Cross-country access routes over the roadless landscape will be used for occasionally accessing areas of the powerline that cannot be reached

directly from an existing road, or where travel within the powerline ROW itself from an existing road is not possible due to topography/terrain. These routes will be used infrequently, once to twice every ten years, for occasional powerline maintenance. These cross-country routes would not be maintained. During use of the cross-country routes, the proponent should not deviate from the unimproved routes located in Sections 16 and 20 on the following maps. The proposed width of all access routes is 20 feet.

Figure 1 Overview Map



## Section 16 Project Area:

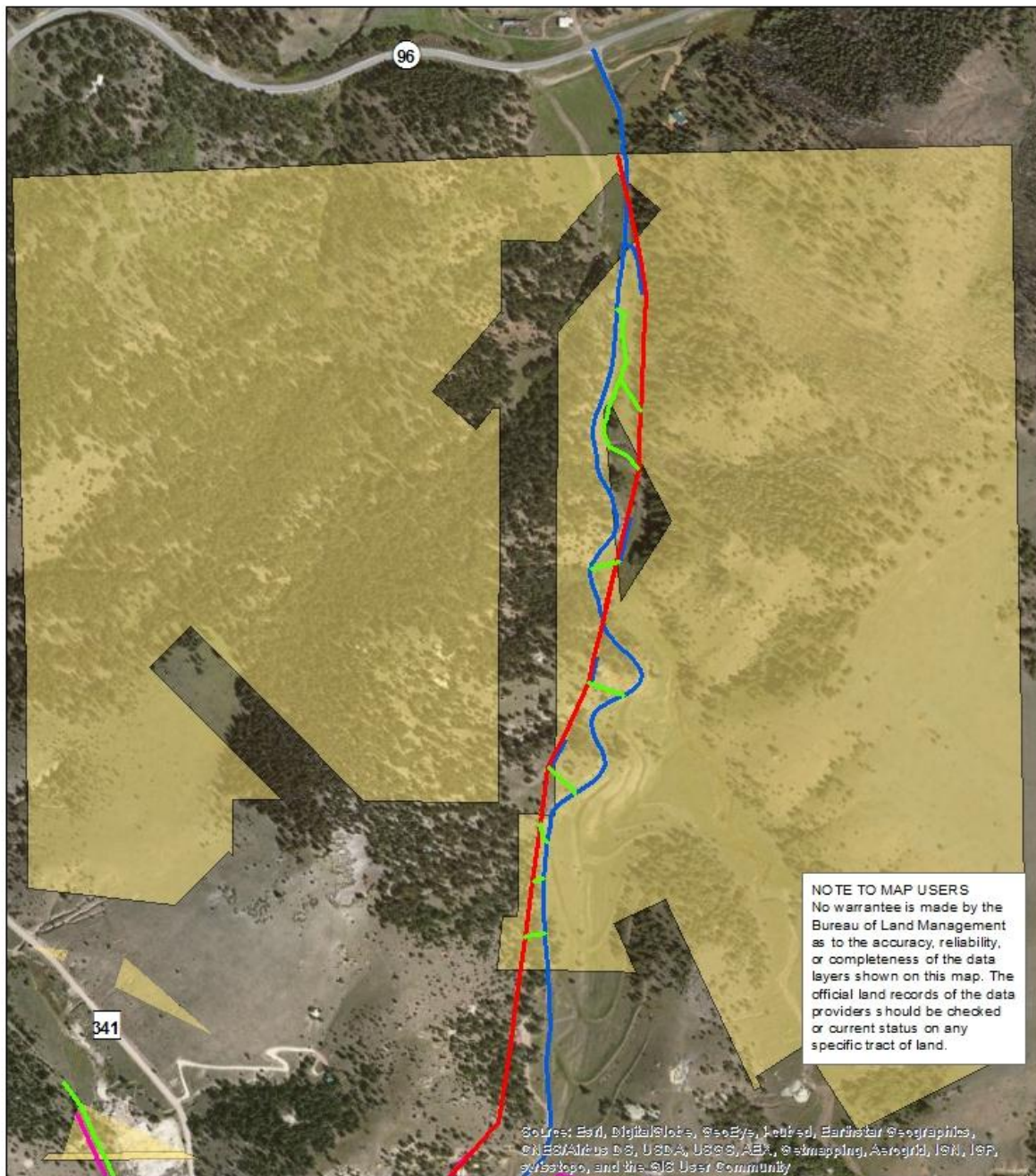
The proposed action within T. 22 S., R. 71 W., sec. 16, consists of rebuilding an overhead 7.2 kV electric distribution powerline and authorizing 20 foot wide access routes across public lands. The existing powerline was constructed in the 1930s with wood poles, wood cross-arms, and steel anchors/guys. The rebuilt line will remain 7.2 kV. It would have taller, stronger wood poles ranging from a minimum of 35 feet to a maximum of 60 feet, with the typical height being 40 feet; wood cross-arms would comply with the RUS Raptor Protection Guide, and steel anchors/guys. This powerline crosses approximately 3,282 feet of BLM lands within Section 16, and is 20 feet wide, for a total of approx. 1.50 acres.

Access routes across public lands within the Section 16 project area include: 1) approx. 4,133 feet of old State Highway 96 (abandoned), and 2) approx. 1,861 feet of cross-country routes over existing landscape, for a total of approx. 2.75 acres. Access routes crossing existing landscape will be used initially for the reconstruction of the distribution line, then infrequently (once or twice every ten years) for occasional maintenance. The proponent would not deviate from the unimproved access routes located on the Section 16 Project Area map. Powerline and access routes in Section 16 would cover approx. 4.25 acres of public lands.

The proposed location of the reconstructed line is along the same route as the existing electric powerline. During the reconstruction of this powerline, SDCEA anticipates having 10+/- vehicles utilizing the access routes across public lands. Vehicles used during reconstruction would include pickup trucks, boom trucks, bucket trucks and stringing trailers, and backhoes. Reconstruction of this powerline would include removal of 15 poles and 5 guys/anchors from BLM lands, and the installation of 12 poles and 5 guys/anchors on BLM lands. Pole and guy/anchor holes would be dug with a backhoe or auger truck. Poles would be installed by burying the butt end into the ground to a depth of approx. 6 feet using a boom truck, and conductors will be fixed to the poles with a bucket truck. SDCEA anticipates removing or limbing a few trees within the existing ROW during reconstruction, with vegetation being removed from BLM lands.



Figure 2 Section 16 Project Map



- Legend**
- Sec\_16\_roads\_over\_landscape
  - Section\_16\_powerline\_reconstruction
  - Section\_16\_roads
  - Section\_16\_powerline

## SDCEA Section 16 Project Area

CO-F02-2013-0026 EA

6PM, T22 S, R71 W, sec. 16



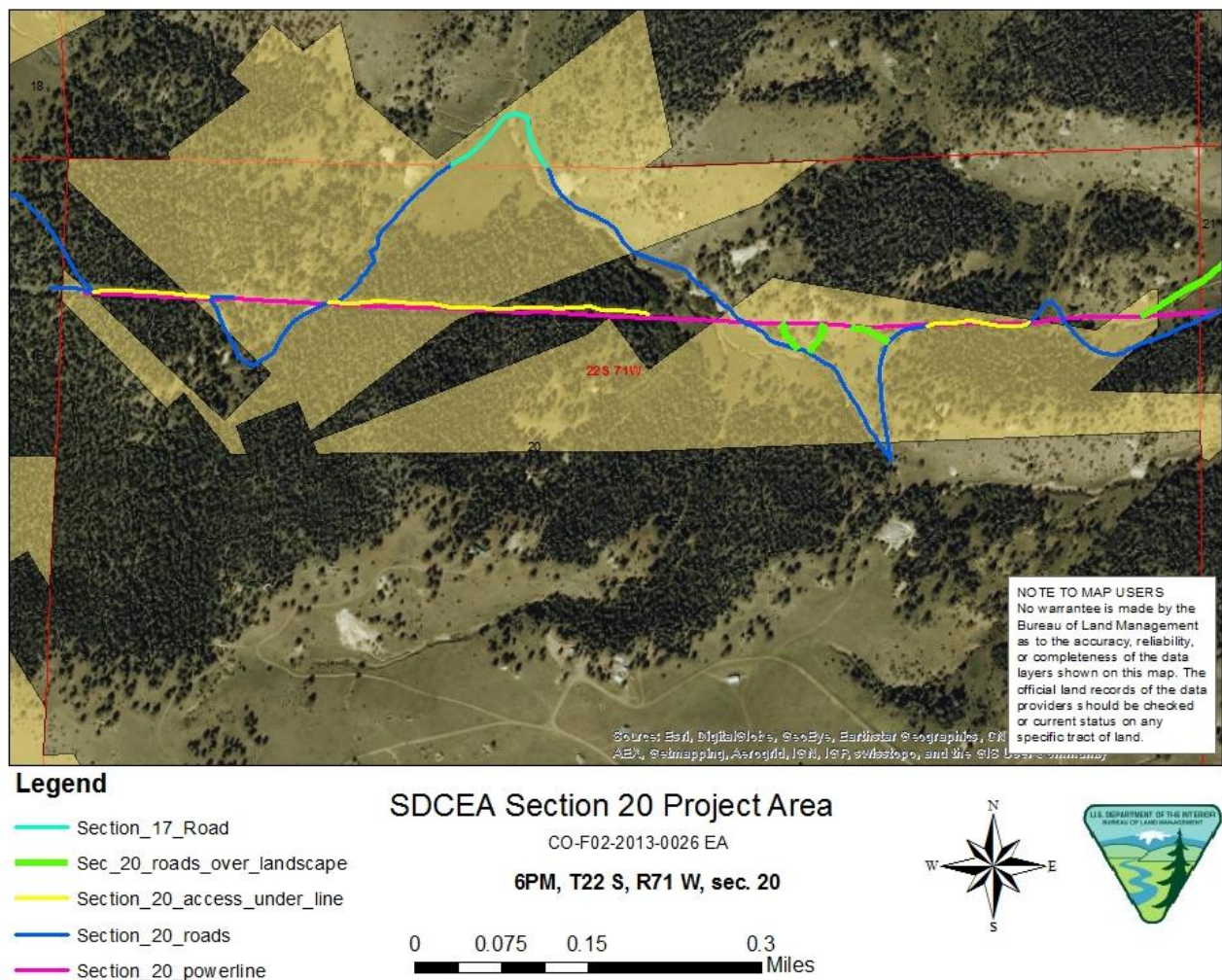
0 0.05 0.1 0.2 0.3 0.4 Miles



## Section 20 Project Area:

The proposed action within T. 22 S., R. 71 W., sec. 20, consists of amending the existing grant to authorize 20 foot wide access routes across public lands and renewal of the existing overhead powerline. The powerline crosses approx. 2,829 feet of public lands and is 20 feet wide, for approx. 1.30 acres. The access route is an existing two-track road that is used for routine inspections and maintenance that crosses approx. 6,136 feet of public lands, for a total of approx. 2.82 acres. (About 700 feet, or approx. 0.32 acres, of this access route is located in Section 17.) Access over the existing landscape is needed for approx. 730 feet of public lands, for a total of approx. 0.34 acres. Access routes crossing existing landscape will be used infrequently (once or twice every ten years) for occasional maintenance. The proponent would not deviate from the unimproved access routes located on the Section 20 Project Area map. Powerline and access routes would cover approx. 4.46 acres of public lands.

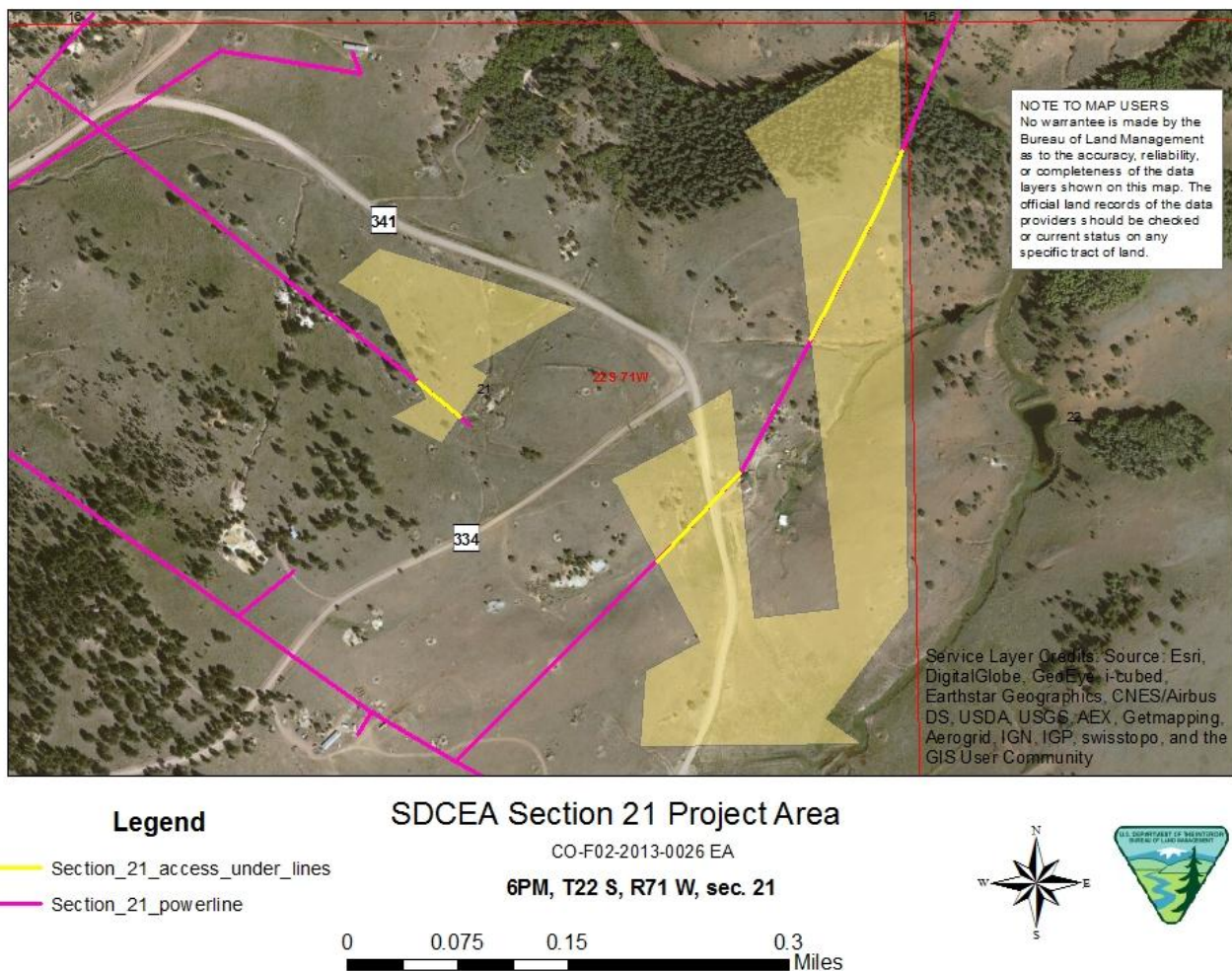
**Figure 3 Section 20 Project Map**



## Section 21 Project Area:

The proposed action within T. 22 S., R. 71 W., sec. 21, consists of renewing the existing single-phase distribution and three-phase overhead powerlines. The single-phase line crosses approx. 1,236 feet of public lands; the three-phase line crosses approx. 599 feet of public lands. Both lines are 20 feet wide, for a total of approx. 0.84 acres. Access routes for both lines are located below the lines, within the powerline boundaries, and are used for routine inspections and occasional maintenance.

Figure 4 Section 21 Project Map

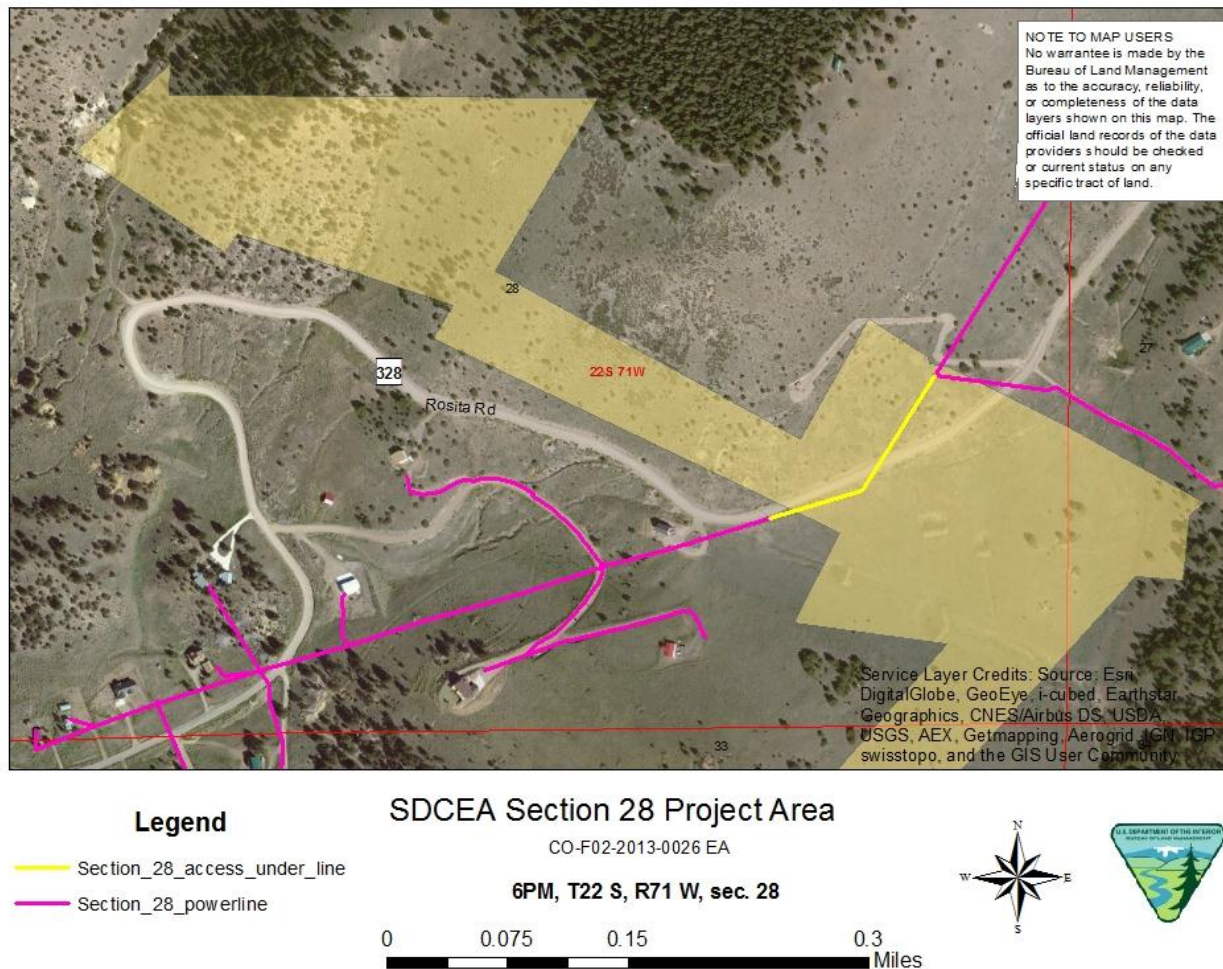




## Section 28 Project Area:

The proposed action within T. 22 S., R. 71 W., sec. 28, consists of renewing the existing overhead powerline. The access route is located below the line, within the powerline boundaries, and is accessible from Custer County Road 328. Access would be used for routine inspections and occasional maintenance. This powerline crosses approx. 857 feet of public lands, and is 20 feet wide, for approx. 0.39 acres.

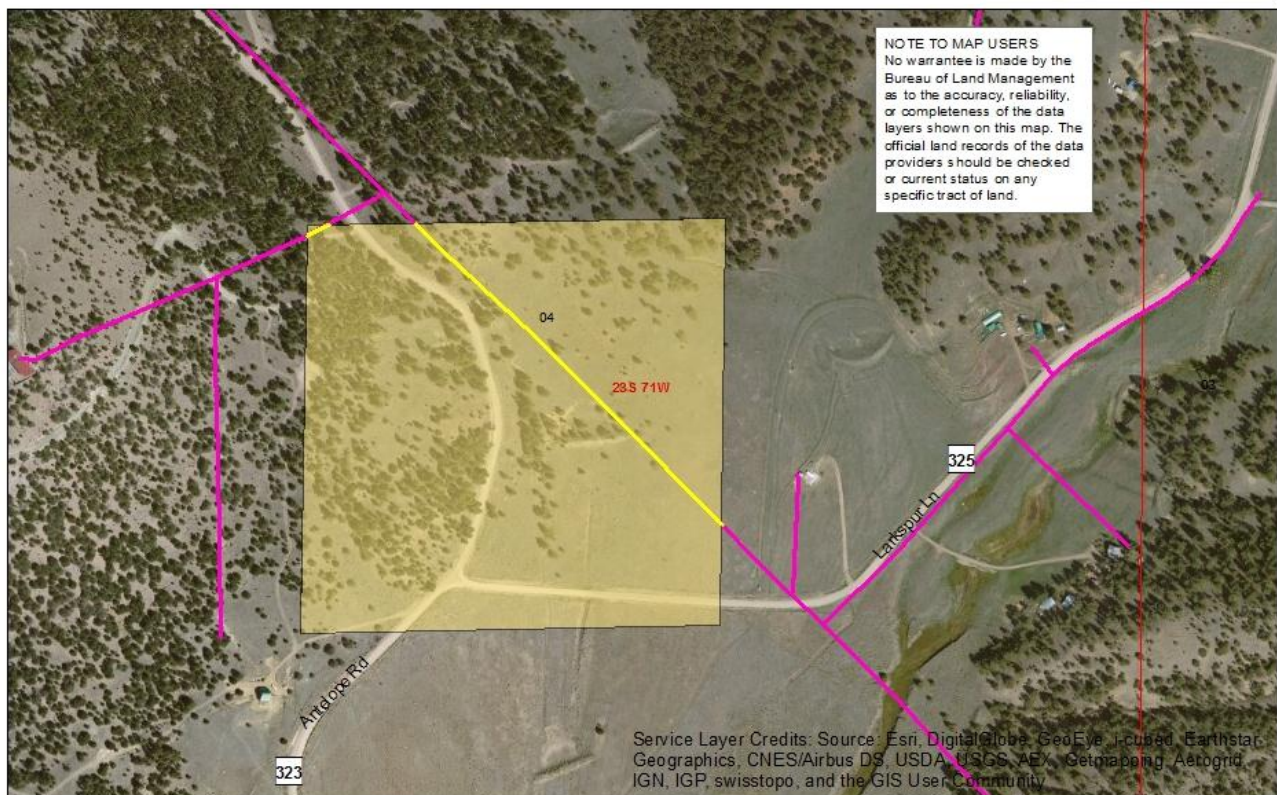
**Figure 5 Section 28 Project Map**



## Section 4 Project Area:

The proposed action within T. 23 S., R. 71 W., sec. 4, consists of renewing the existing overhead powerline. This powerline crosses approx. 1,363 feet of public lands, and is 20 feet wide, for approx. 0.63 acres. The access route is located below the line, within the powerline boundaries, and is accessed from Custer County Road 323 or Custer County Road 325. The access route would be used for routine inspections and occasional maintenance.

Figure 6 Section 4 Project Map



### Legend

- Section\_4\_access\_under\_lines
- Section\_4\_powerline

### SDCEA Section 4 Project Area

CO-F02-2013-0026 EA

6PM, T23 S, R71 W, sec. 4

0 0.05 0.1 0.2 Miles



### **2.2.2 No Action Alternative**

The no action alternative would result in not renewing the existing right-of-way authorization, and maintenance and upgrading of the line would not take place on BLM administered lands. If no action is taken, the existing ROW would remain expired, the existing access routes would continue to be used for inspection, and Sangre de Cristo Electric Association would be unable to reconstruct the powerline in Section 16.

### **2.2.3 Alternatives**

No other alternatives were considered because this is an existing ROW with existing access routes.

## **CHAPTER 3 - AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND EFFECTS**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This section provides a description of the human and natural environmental resources that could be affected by the Proposed Action and presents comparative analyses of the direct, indirect and cumulative effects on the affected environment stemming from the implementation of the actions under the Proposed Action and other alternatives analyzed.

#### **3.1.1 Interdisciplinary Team Review**

The following table is provided as a mechanism for resource staff review, to identify those resource values with issues or potential impacts from the proposed action and/or alternatives. Those resources identified in the table as impacted or potentially impacted will be brought forward for analysis.

<b><u>Resource</u></b>	<b><u>Initial and date</u></b>	<b><u>Comment or Reason for Dismissal from Analysis</u></b>
<b><u>Air Quality</u></b> <i>Ty Webb, Chad Meister, Melissa Hovey</i>	TW, 10/20/14	No Impacts
<b><u>Geology/Minerals</u></b> <i>Stephanie Carter, Melissa Smeins</i>	SSC, 11/19/14	The federal minerals in the proposed project area are open to mineral location, therefore requiring coordination between surface uses as applicable. If there are unpatented mining claims that are active in the proposed project location, any associated claim markers encountered during project implementation cannot be disturbed (reference CO-2012-013). However, as of November 2014 there are no active claims in these areas.
<b><u>Soils</u></b> <i>John Smeins</i>	JS, 11/5/14	See Soils section, 3.2.3



<b><u>Resource</u></b>	<b><u>Initial and date</u></b>	<b><u>Comment or Reason for Dismissal from Analysis</u></b>
<b><u>Water Quality</u></b> <u>Surface and Ground</u> <i>John Smeins</i>	JS, 11/5/14	See Water Quality section, 3.2.4
<b><u>Invasive Plants</u></b> <i>John Lamman</i>	JL, 11/06/2014	See Affected Environment
<b><u>T&amp;E and Sensitive Species</u></b> <i>Matt Rustand</i>	MR, 10/27/2014	There are no known habitat and/or physical location for federally listed threatened, endangered, or sensitive species within the project boundary. Furthermore, there has been no designation of critical habitat for federally listed threatened or endangered species within the project boundary. There will be no impact to the T&E land health standards.
<b><u>Vegetation</u></b> <i>Jeff Williams, Chris Cloninger, John Lamman</i>	JL, 11/06/2014	See Affected Environment
<b><u>Wetlands and Riparian</u></b> <i>Dave Gilbert</i>	DG, 10/23/14	See Affected Environment
<b><u>Wildlife Aquatic</u></b> <i>Dave Gilbert</i>	DG, 10/23/14	See Affected Environment
<b><u>Wildlife Terrestrial</u></b> <i>Matt Rustand</i>	MR, 10/27/2014	See Affected Environment.
<b><u>Migratory Birds</u></b> <i>Matt Rustand</i>	MR, 10/27/2014	See Affected Environment.
<b><u>Cultural Resources</u></b> <i>Monica Weimer, Michael Troyer</i>	MMW, 06/10/2015	See Affected Environment.
<b><u>Native American Religious Concerns</u></b> <i>Monica Weimer, Michael Troyer</i>	MMW, 06/10/2015	Although aboriginal sites are present in the vicinity of the area of potential effect, no possible traditional cultural properties or sacred sites were located during the cultural resources inventory (see Cultural Resources section, above). There is no other known evidence that suggests the project area holds special significance for Native Americans.
<b><u>Economics</u></b>	mw, 6/18/15	This action will not result in significant impacts to the socio economics of individuals or of the region.
<b><u>Paleontology</u></b> <i>Melissa Smeins, Stephanie Carter</i>	SSC, 11/19/14	The geology in this area is not likely to contain recognizable paleontological resources and therefore this project will not have an adverse impact.
<b><u>Visual Resources</u></b> <i>Linda Skinner</i>	LS 11/18/14	The project is a replacement of wood posts with similar type wood posts so therefore visual effects would be similar to the current state.
<b><u>Environmental Justice</u></b> <i>Martin Weimer</i>	mw, 6/18/15	The proposed action affects areas that are rural in nature. The land adjacent to these parcels is open rangeland, as a result, there are no minority or low-income populations in or near the project area. As such, the proposal will not have a disproportionately high or adverse environmental effect on minority or low-income populations.

<b><u>Resource</u></b>	<b><u>Initial and date</u></b>	<b><u>Comment or Reason for Dismissal from Analysis</u></b>
<b><u>Wastes Hazardous or Solid</u></b> <i>Stephanie Carter</i>	SSC, 11/19/14	<p>If the project involves oil or fuel usage, transfer or storage, an adequate spill kit and shovels are required to be onsite during project implementation. The project proponent will be responsible for adhering to all applicable local, State and Federal regulations in the event of a spill, which includes following the proper notification procedures in BLM's Spill Contingency Plan. If concrete is proposed as part of the project, all concrete washout water needs to be contained and properly disposed of at a permitted offsite disposal facility.</p> <p>Nothing in the analysis or approval of this action by BLM authorizes or in any way permits a release or threat of a release of hazardous materials (as defined under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980, as amended, 42 U.S.C. 9601 et seq., and its regulations) into the environment that will require a response action or result in the incurrence of response costs.</p>
<b><u>Recreation</u></b> <i>Linda Skinner</i>	LS 11/18/14	The project area is not known for recreation except for possible hunting activities. Coordination of project timing outside of hunting seasons would avoid user conflicts.
<b><u>Farmlands Prime and Unique</u></b> <i>Jeff Williams, Chris Cloninger, John Lamman</i>	JL, 11/06/2014	No Prime or Unique Farmlands.
<b><u>Lands and Realty</u></b> <i>Greg Valladares, Rich Rotte</i>	GDV, 12/03/2014	See Affected Environment.
<b><u>Wilderness, WSAs, ACECs, Wild &amp; Scenic Rivers</u></b> <i>Linda Skinner</i>	LS 11/18/14	The project area does not have any designations associated with it.
<b><u>Wilderness Characteristics</u></b> <i>Linda Skinner</i>	LS 11/18/14	The project area has not been identified as having wilderness characteristics.
<b><u>Range Management</u></b> <i>Jeff Williams, Chris Cloninger, John Lamman</i>	JL, 11/06/2014	No Impacts
<b><u>Forest Management</u></b> <i>Ken Reed</i>	KR 10/21/14	See write up
<b><u>Cadastral Survey</u></b> <i>Dave Parker</i>	DP6/18/15	No Concerns
<b><u>Noise</u></b> <i>Martin Weimer</i>	mw, 6/18/15	This action will not result in any significant impacts due to noise or result in any increased noise levels.
<b><u>Fire</u></b> <i>Ty Webb</i>	TW, 10/20/14	No Impacts
<b><u>Law Enforcement</u></b> <i>Steve Cunningham</i>		

The affected resources brought forward for analysis include:

- Soils
- Water Quality
- Invasive Plants
- Vegetation
- Wetlands and Riparian
- Wildlife Aquatic
- Wildlife Terrestrial
- Migratory Birds
- Lands and Realty
- Forest Management
- Cultural Resources

## **3.2 PHYSICAL RESOURCES**

### **3.2.1 SOILS (includes a finding on standard 1)**

#### **Affected Environment:**

The access roads and powerline installations occur on several different soil types, mainly in an upland rangeland setting except for the reach that crosses Tyndall Gulch in section 16. These soils are generally loams to sandy and extremely-cobbly sandy loams. Some soil types are not exceptionally thick, with depth to bedrock being less to much less than 80 inches deep. Ratings for shallow excavations vary from somewhat limited to very limited, and soil suitability for off-road travel ranges from well suited to poorly suited generally correlated with slope angle.

#### **Environmental Effects**

##### **Proposed Action**

##### **Direct and Indirect Impacts:**

Removal and installation of new power poles would require shallow holes to be dug near Tyndall Creek as well as upland rangelands. Impacts from this activity are not expected to substantially impact soil resources since the major alterations are occurring along well spaced points across the surface. Excavations for the new poles will unearth new soils along points of the line but are not expected to harm soil resources as a whole. In places where old poles are removed without replacement, holes that are left open would create a hazardous situation.

Access would be across some soils that are poorly suited for roads. Erosion may be an issue on steeper soils and near the points where the majority of the work and disturbance takes place. However, since the impacts would just be from cross country travel that would lead to vegetative trampling more than removal, impacts are expected to be minor and short term. Any soil disturbance is expected to reclaim quickly. In addition, most of the disturbances will be seen

within the first year of work. As maintenance traffic occurs once or twice every ten years, these tracks would naturally start to reclaim themselves after work was complete.

Protective/Mitigation Measures:

In areas where new poles are relocated from old holes, use of excavated soil should be used to fill in those holes to minimize safety hazards.

Cumulative Impacts:

The Proposed Action essentially has the same footprint and disturbance as is currently on the ground. Over the long term this would add little new soil impacts to the watershed.

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts:

Under a No Action Alternative, not renewing the ROW is not expected to impact soil resources.

Protective/Mitigation Measures:

None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Upland Soils:

Currently, soils in the area are meeting land health standards and are expected to continue meeting standards if the Proposed Action is implemented.

**3.2.2 WATER (SURFACE AND GROUNDWATER, FLOODPLAINS) (includes a finding on standard 5)**

Affected Environment:

The areas affected by the Proposed Action are primarily in the Outlet Grape Creek watershed (110200011302) that drains Tyndall Gulch and Brush Hollow Creek into Grape Creek, below Deweese Reservoir. The nearby Westliffe meteorological station (058931) maintained by the Western Regional Climate Center shows an average of 15 inches of annual precipitation that fall mainly in the summer months of July and August.

There are five access routes that cross intermittent stream channels, four of which are on BLM. Section 16 has three crossings at Tyndall Gulch, and section 17 has one that crosses an unnamed channel. There are no known water quality concerns in the area.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts:

Over the life of the project, most of the impacts to water resources will likely occur within the first year near the overland crossings at Tyndall Gulch in section 16, and the unnamed channel in section 17. The direct impacts may include some vegetation loss and compaction of stream banks that indirectly increase erosion and sedimentation to Tyndall. Digging of holes for new power lines may touch groundwater if poles are located too close to Tyndall.

Impacts from the action could be severe if the project involved making large, continuous alterations to the landscape such as blading new roads and installing underground cable. However, using low volume access roads with overhead power lines, the action is relatively low in magnitude, and well distributed across time and space. Given that these structures are already onsite, the Proposed Action is not expected to severely impact surface or groundwater hydrology or water quality. With adequate attention paid to protective measures, any floodplain damages during repairs can be minimal.

Protective/Mitigation Measures:

Impacts to intermittent streams and floodplain areas can be limited by scheduling reconstruction and maintenance inspections during seasonal low/no flows or times of frozen soils. In addition, re-installation of power poles should be done at an elevation at least 6 feet above the normal water level within Tyndall Gulch to lengthen the life of the poles, and lessen the need for maintenance traffic.

Cumulative Impacts:

The Proposed Action essentially has the same footprint and disturbance as is currently on the ground. Over the long term this would add little new water resource impacts to the watershed.

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts:

Under a No Action Alternative, not renewing the ROW would not impact water resources.

Protective/Mitigation Measures:

None

Cumulative Impacts:

None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Water Quality:

Currently, water quality in the area are meeting land health standards and are expected to continue meeting if the Proposed Action is implemented.

### **3.3 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES**

#### **3.3.1 INVASIVE PLANTS\***

Affected Environment: Invasive plants are common in the area due to historical agricultural practices. The native plant community has been altered due to the historical practices in the area. The ecological sites that make up the project site are prone to a variety of weed infestations if soil surface disturbance occurs. Invasive plants within 10 miles of the project area include but are not limited to: Spotted knapweed, diffuse knapweed, Russian knapweed, yellow toadflax, oxeye daisy, leafy spurge, houndstongue, musk thistle, and Canada thistle,

#### **Environmental Effects**

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Due to the long-term exposure of the project area to historical practices, expected impacts are thought to be minor.



Protective/Mitigation Measures: Equipment used to implement the proposed action should be washed prior to entering the project area to remove any plant materials, soil, or grease. Areas disturbed by project implementation will be monitored for the presence of weeds on the Colorado State Noxious Weed list. Identified noxious weeds will be treated. Monitoring is required for the life of the project and for three years following completion and elimination of identified Colorado State Noxious Weeds list A and B species.

Cumulative Impacts: None.

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: None.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

\*Invasive plants are plants that are not part of (if exotic), or are a minor component of (if native), the original plant community or communities that have the potential to become a dominant or co-dominant species on the site if their future establishment and growth are not actively controlled by management interventions, or are classified as exotic or noxious plants under state or federal law. Species that become dominant for only one to several years (e.g., short-term response to drought or wildfire) are not invasive plants.

### **3.3.2 VEGETATION3.3.3 VEGETATION (includes a finding on standard 3)**

Affected Environment: The proposed action occurs within both a mixed conifer woodland with areas of aspen and open mountain parks. The woodland community consists mainly of ponderosa pine, white fir, Douglas-fir and aspen. Shrubs found in the area are wax current, Mountain Mahogany, and rabbitbrush. Dominant grasses found on the site include blue grama, needle-and-thread, western wheatgrass, Indian Ricegrass, sand dropseed, sideoats grama and cati species. Vegetation ground cover is dependant on the amount of overstory and competition from woody plant species and soil characteristics.

#### Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The proposed action will directly impact a minimal amount of vegetation. Total removal of vegetation will occur where holes are dug for guys/anchors and poles. Revegetation will take place over time as surrounding vegetation colonizes disturbed sites.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: None

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Plant and Animal Communities: A formal health assessment has been conducted on some of the parcels in this area. Based on existing Land Health assessments and observations, it would appear that upland vegetative standards are being met on a landscape basis.

### **3.3.3 WETLANDS & RIPARIAN ZONES (includes a finding on standard 2)**

Affected Environment: The powerline, on public lands, crosses only ephemeral drainages except for in section 16 where it crosses, or is adjacent to Tyndall Gulch. Tyndall Gulch was assessed in 2009 and found to be in functional condition. This small stream is mostly downslope from an old roadway, and the powerline is mostly upslope of the road and relatively removed from wetland areas. The Tyndall Gulch drainage in this vicinity is modified by the road, small scale mining, rural development and additional subdivision roads, and some historic furrow contouring to deal with past erosion control efforts. In spite of these previous actions, the short reach of the gulch on public land was in good condition relative to the situation, when assessed.

#### Environmental Effects

##### Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: This action will have negligible and not long lasting effects from any activity proposed here to these resources.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Clean equipment needs to be utilized on the project to minimize the risk of introducing noxious weeds into the riparian area

Cumulative Impacts: This activity is largely just sustaining what is in the area presently. No new cumulative impacts are foreseen.

##### No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Not maintaining this line will not change the existing situation relative to wetlands resources.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Riparian Systems: This action should not alter the present situation of the riparian resource being in functional condition.

### **3.3.4 WILDLIFE AQUATIC (includes a finding on standard 3)**

Affected Environment: See Riparian Wetland section 3.3.4

#### Environmental Effects

##### Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Same as for the Riparian and Wetland Section 3.3.4

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Clean equipment needs to be utilized on the project to minimize the risk of introducing noxious weeds into the riparian area. In addition, the employees conducting work should have spill prevention equipment accessible to prevent any unanticipated vehicle or equipment's chemical spill from entering the water.

Cumulative Impacts: This activity sustains what is in the area presently. No new cumulative impacts are foreseen.

##### No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Not maintaining this line will not change the existing situation relative to aquatic resources.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Plant and Animal Communities: This action will not harm any aquatic wildlife or habitat if conducted as planned and discussed in this document. Perching of avian predators on power poles is likely a negligible affect as the line travels through an area of natural perches so that predation on aquatic obligate wildlife species is likely unchanged.

### **3.3.5 WILDLIFE TERRESTRIAL (includes a finding on standard 3)**

Affected Environment: The forest type as described is mixed coniferous forest with some mixture of ponderosa pine, Douglas and white fir. These forests are typically very dry and warm, with less than 25 in of precipitation annually. Ponderosa pines are the largest conifers in Colorado and Gambel oak is a common component of the understory, typically in a shrubby form. Other common understory shrubs include mountain mahogany and wax currant. The forests on public land are generally closed canopy systems due to a lack of disturbance. A closed canopy obstructs the amount of sunlight reaching the forest floor, inhibiting the amount of understory growth, decreasing diversity in habitat for terrestrial wildlife. Game species expected to inhabit this habitat type include elk, mule deer, black bear, and wild turkey. The project area does serve as big game severe winter range.

#### Environmental Effects

##### Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The proposed actions associated with the renewal of the right of way agreement are not dissimilar to the current situation. However, the enlarging of the line and addition of access routes do increase impacts on the landscape through direct habitat removal. The increase of road networks will expand the indirect impacts by introducing increased penetration of human development into species habitat. The introduction of new road ways and increasing the ease of access, legal or not, will create a greater probability of vehicle collision, increase noise effects, and elicit additional flight responses, reducing overall survivorship of terrestrial species. While on the macro scale the area is heavily disturbed with human development, many species occupy space in a micro environment. While impacts associated with the proposed action may be perceived as minor and insignificant to humans, these same impacts substantial to other life. Any action that increases human interruption to terrestrial wildlife life cycles will deteriorate species fitness.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Consolidate utility corridors along existing, maintained, and active human created corridors. Minimize, to the greatest extent, the creation of new road ways. If current utility corridor is utilized, consider seasonal closures on administrative only roads where visual site line of power line is obscured from primary roadway to protect wintering big game (December 1 – April 30).

Cumulative Impacts: While the power corridor exists, the proposed action introduces an additional system of spur roads to maintain the utility. Therefore, an expected increase in presence utility company employees and vehicles where they were once absent.

##### No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Effects would be similar as the existing condition; however, the proponent may seek alternatives to crossing public lands

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Plant and Animal Communities: The action will not cause a substantial change to the land health standard.as net impact to the current environment is minor.

### **3.3.6 MIGRATORY BIRDS**

Affected Environment: Ponderosa pine forests are very dry and warm, with less than 25 in of precipitation annually. Ponderosa pines are the largest conifers in Colorado and Gambel oak is a common component of the understory, typically in a shrubby form. Other common understory shrubs include mountain mahogany and wax currant. Tree species sometimes found mixed with ponderosa pine are junipers, pinyon pine, aspen, white fir, and Douglas-fir. Birds typical of the ponderosa pine forest type include Merriam's turkey, Williamson's sapsucker, pygmy nuthatch, western bluebird, band-tailed pigeon, Grace's warbler, flammulated owl, red-breasted nuthatch, violet-green swallow, western tanager, and chipping sparrow. Ponderosa pine forests support a rich avifauna, in part a reflection of the prevalence of Gambel's oak in many ponderosa stands. Oak adds structure and prey--insect densities are higher in oak than in nearby conifers.

Birds typical of the ponderosa pine forest type include wild turkey, pygmy nuthatch, western bluebird, and chipping sparrow. More bird species are found in ponderosa pine forests than any other coniferous forest habitat in this region. This abundant bird life reflects in part the prevalence of Gambel oak in many ponderosa stands. Oak adds structure, acorns, and prey--insect densities are higher in oak than in nearby conifers.

### **Environmental Effects**

#### **Proposed Action**

Direct and Indirect Impacts: See Terrestrial Wildlife section.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: See Terrestrial Wildlife section.

Cumulative Impacts: See Terrestrial Wildlife section.

#### **No Action Alternative**

Direct and Indirect Impacts: See Terrestrial Wildlife section.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: See Terrestrial Wildlife section.

## **3.4 HERITAGE RESOURCES AND HUMAN ENVIRONMENT**

### **3.4.1 CULTURAL RESOURCES**

Affected Environment: Only historic sites and isolated finds were found the area of potential effect (see Report CR-RG-15-28 P). Sites 5CR626, 5CR630.1 and 5CR631.1 are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

## Environmental Effects

Proposed Action: Because BLM will put the following stipulation on the grant, the historic properties will not be adversely affected by the proposed undertaking:

“Prior to any road maintenance or proposed construction, the proponent must contact the BLM archaeologist. Depending on the nature of the proposed alterations to the road, BLM might require an archaeological monitor to be present during construction. If additional mitigation is required, a treatment plan must be prepared, the treatment conducted, and documentation prepared before BLM issues a notice to proceed. The proponent will be required to hire an archaeological contractor that holds a BLM permit in good standing to perform the monitoring, write the treatment plan, carry out the treatment, and prepare all required documentation.”

**Direct and Indirect Impacts:** None.

**Protective/Mitigation Measures:** None.

**Cumulative Impacts:** None.

### **No Action Alternative:**

**Direct and Indirect Impacts:** None.

**Protective/Mitigation Measures:** None.

## **3.5 LAND RESOURCES**

### **3.5.1 LANDS AND REALTY**

Affected Environment: The proposed action is in the vicinity of a buried phone cable right-of-way authorized to Qwest Corporation under serial number COC-38702. Qwest was notified by letter dated 11/21/2014 and has issued no response to the proposed action.

## Environmental Effects

### **Proposed Action**

**Direct and Indirect Impacts:** Temporary increase in traffic along old County Road 96 across public lands during the reconstruction of powerline in Section 16. There is a potential to impact the buried Qwest cable during pole replacement. Use of the unimproved, cross-country access routes to the powerline will result in a short-term increase in vehicle and personnel traffic in the area, but the expected frequency of use, once to twice every ten years, would have minimal impacts to the area.

**Protective/Mitigation Measures:** The proponent should work with the other utility in the area prior to reconstruction activities to ensure there is no impact to existing facilities. To minimize any impact, the proponent should not deviate from the unimproved routes located in Sections 16 and 20 identified on Figure 2 and Figure 3.



Cumulative Impacts: None.

#### No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The No Action Alternative would result in not renewing Sangre de Cristo Electric Association's right-of-way, they would not reconstruct a span of powerline in Section 16, and they would not be authorized for access routes to the existing powerline.

### **3.5.2 FOREST MANAGEMENT**

Affected Environment: The forests found in the project area vary by aspect. Pinyon and ponderosa pine dominate the southern aspects. Ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir and white fir dominate the northern aspects of the project area.

Environmental Effects: The proposed action should have no impact to forest management actions or degrade forest health

#### Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Trees may need to be pruned or clear along the existing ROW and access roads.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: The RGFO forester shall be notified 2 weeks in advance of any tree cutting. The forester will meet with a Sangre de Cristo official and agree upon which trees need to be removed. Depending on species and tree sizes will determine the price for the tree to be removed. Trees 5 to 10 inches in diameter at breast height will be considered fuelwood and purchased at \$10/cord. Any tree over 10 inches in diameter at breast height will be considered sawtimber and purchased at \$35/MBF.

Cumulative Impacts: None

#### No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: None

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

### **3.6 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY**

The proposed action is predominantly the renewal of existing powerline facilities and authorization of existing roads to the proponent. The powerline has been in existence since the 1930s. Access routes for overland travel only for occasional maintenance once or twice every ten years will result in minimal impacts to resources. The reconstruction of the existing powerline within Section 16 will have short-term impacts during the construction period with minimal disturbance as it is an existing line and new poles will be placed alongside the existing poles being replaced. Cumulatively, the proposed action will have little impact on the area.

## **CHAPTER 4 - CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION**

### **4.1 LIST OF PREPARERS AND PARTICIPANTS**

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Please see Interdisciplinary Team Review list for BLM Participants

### **4.2 TRIBES, INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS, OR AGENCIES CONSULTED**

- Sangre de Cristo Electric Association, P.O. Box 2013 Buena Vista, CO 81211
- Qwest Corporation, 222 West 5<sup>th</sup> St., Room 103, Pueblo, CO 81003

## **CHAPTER 5 - REFERENCES**

Bureau of Land Management (BLM). 1993. Draft Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. Royal Gorge Field Office. Cañon City, Colorado.

Bureau of Land Management. 1996. Royal Gorge Resource Area Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision. Cañon City District. Cañon City, Colorado.

Bureau of Land Management. 2008. H-1790-1 National Environmental Policy Handbook. Washington, D.C.

# **Finding Of No Significant Impact (FONSI)**

## **DOI-BLM-CO-200-2013-0026 EA**

Based on review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the project is not a major federal action and will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects from any alternative assessed or evaluated meet the definition of significance in context or intensity, as defined by 43 CFR 1508.27. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described below:

### **RATIONALE:**

#### **Context:**

The proposed action is located in Custer County, Colorado, to the southeast of Silver Cliff, Colorado, south of State Highway 96. The project location is in both mixed conifer woodland consisting mainly of ponderosa pine, white fir, Douglas fir and areas of aspen; and open mountain parks. The grant (COC-36854) was originally issued in 1985 and expired in 2015, though the line has been in existence since the 1930s. Sangre de Cristo Electric Association (SDCEA) applied to amend the grant for the reconstruction of a portion of powerline in April, 2013, and later amended their application to include renewal of the grant in August, 2014. The existing powerline provides power to residents and businesses in the Querida and Rosita, CO areas.

The proposed action would: renew an existing overhead powerline that serves many residences in Querida and Rosita, CO for a 30-year term; authorize reconstruction of a portion of powerline in Section 16 that has poles that have been determined to be rotten below ground level; and would authorize 20 foot wide access routes used to inspect and maintain the existing powerline.

#### **Intensity:**

I have considered the potential intensity/severity of the impacts anticipated from the Sangre de Cristo Electric Association Powerline ROW Amendment and Renewal Project decision relative to each of the ten areas suggested for consideration by the CEQ. With regard to each:

#### **Impacts that may be beneficial and adverse:**

Impacts from the proposed action to soils, water, invasive plants, vegetation, wetlands and riparian zones are considered minor or non-existent. The proposed action does introduce an additional system of unmaintained, cross-country spur roads to maintain the utility. Therefore, an increase in the presence of utility company employees and vehicles where they were once absent can be expected.

Beneficial impacts would be the replacement of wooden poles that have been identified as rotten below ground level and the continuation of electrical service to the residents of Querida and Rosita, CO.

**Public health and safety:**

No impacts to public health and safety are anticipated. The proposed action will allow for replacement of a portion of powerline that has been identified as having poles rotten below ground level, and for the periodic inspection of the powerline to ensure it is maintained in a safe manner.

**Unique characteristics of the geographic area:**

None present.

**Degree to which effects are likely to be highly controversial:**

There is no disagreement among reviewers or ID team members over the effects of the proposed action on a resource value.

**Degree to which effects are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks:**

Repair and maintenance of powerlines is a routine action for powerline rights-of-ways.

**Consideration of whether the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant impacts:**

This decision is like one of many that have previously been made and will continue to be made by BLM responsible officials. The decision is within the scope of the Resource Management Plan and is not expected to establish a precedent for future actions. The decision does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

**Consideration of whether the action is related to other actions with cumulatively significant impacts:**

The proposed action is predominantly the renewal of existing powerline facilities and authorization of existing roads to the proponent. The powerline has been in existence since the 1930s. Access routes for overland travel only for occasional maintenance once or twice every ten years will result in minimal impacts to resources. The reconstruction of the existing powerline within Section 16 will have short-term impacts during the construction period with minimal disturbance as it is an existing line and new poles will be placed alongside the existing poles being replaced. Cumulatively, the proposed action will have little impact on the area.

**Scientific, cultural or historical resources, including those listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places:**

Only historic sites and isolated finds were found the area of potential effect (see Report CR-RG-15-28 P). Sites 5CR626, 5CR630.1 and 5CR631.1 are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. These resources will not be impacted with stipulations that will be placed on the grant.

**Threatened and endangered species and their critical habitat:**

There are no known habitat and/or physical location for federally listed threatened, endangered, or sensitive species within the project boundary. Furthermore, there has been no designation of critical habitat for federally listed threatened or endangered species within the project boundary. There will be no impact to the T&E land health standards.

**Any effects that threaten a violation of Federal, State or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment:** The proposed action conforms with the provisions of NEPA (U.S.C. 4321-4346) and FLPMA (43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.) and is compliant with the Clean Water Act and The Clean Air Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and the Endangered Species Act.

NAME OF PREPARER: Greg Valladares

SUPERVISORY REVIEW: /s/ Jay Raiford

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: /s/ Martin Weimer

DATE: 6/29/15

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:

/s/ Keith E. Berger  
Keith E. Berger, Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: 6/29/15

APPENDICES:

ATTACHMENTS:



**UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
ROYAL GORGE FIELD OFFICE**

**DECISION RECORD  
Sangre de Cristo Electric Association  
Powerline ROW Amendment and Renewal  
DOI-BLM-CO-200-2013-0026-EA**

DECISION: It is my decision to authorize the Proposed Action as described in the attached EA. The selected action is located in Custer County, Colorado, to the southeast of Silver Cliff, Colorado, south of State Highway 96. The project location is in both mixed conifer woodland consisting mainly of ponderosa pine, white fir, Douglas fir and areas of aspen; and open mountain parks. The grant (COC-36854) was originally issued in 1985 and expired in 2015, though the line has been in existence since the 1930s. Sangre de Cristo Electric Association (SDCEA) applied to amend the grant for the reconstruction of a portion of powerline in April, 2013, and later amended their application to include renewal of the grant in August, 2014. The existing powerline provides power to residents and businesses in the Querida and Rosita, CO areas.

The selected action will: renew an existing overhead powerline that serves many residences in Querida and Rosita, CO for a 30-year term; authorize reconstruction of a portion of powerline in Section 16 that has poles that have been determined to be rotten below ground level; and will authorize 20 foot wide access routes used to inspect and maintain the existing powerline. This decision is contingent on meeting all mitigation measures and monitoring requirements listed below.

Scoping, by posting this project on the Royal Gorge Field Office NEPA website, was the primary mechanism used by the BLM to initially identify issues. No comments were received.

This office completed an Environmental Assessment and reached a Finding of No Significant Impact indicating that the action has been analyzed in the EA and the selected alternative will have no significant effect, therefore, an EIS will not be prepared.

RATIONALE: This action will renew Sangre de Cristo Electric Association's existing powerline right-of-way for a term of 30 years, it will authorize the reconstruction of a section of existing powerline that has poles rotten below ground level, and will authorize access routes for the inspection and maintenance of the powerline, allowing for uninterrupted electrical service to the public.

MITIGATION MEASURES\MONITORING:

- Equipment used to implement the proposed action should be washed prior to entering the project area to remove any plant materials, soil, or grease. Areas disturbed by project implementation will be monitored for the presence of weeds on the Colorado State

Noxious Weed list. Monitoring is required for the life of the project and for three years following project completion. Identified noxious weeds in disturbed areas will be treated.

- The proponent shall not deviate from the unimproved routes located in Sections 16 and 20 as identified in Figures 2 and 3.
- The RGFO forester shall be notified 2 weeks in advance of any tree cutting. The forester will meet with a Sangre de Cristo official and agree upon which trees need to be removed. Depending on species and tree sizes will determine the price for the tree to be removed. Trees 5 to 10 inches in diameter at breast height will be considered fuelwood and purchased at \$10/cord. Any tree over 10 inches in diameter at breast height will be considered sawtimber and purchased at \$35/MBF.
- Re-installation of power poles should be done at an elevation at least 6 feet above normal water level within Tyndall Gulch to lengthen the life of the poles and lessen the need for maintenance traffic.
- In areas where new poles are relocated from old holes, use of excavated soil can be used to fill in those holes to minimize safety hazards.
- Prior to any road maintenance or proposed construction, the proponent must contact the BLM archaeologist. Depending on the nature of the proposed alterations to the road, BLM might require an archaeological monitor to be present during construction. If additional mitigation is required, a treatment plan must be prepared, the treatment conducted, and documentation prepared before BLM issues a notice to proceed. The proponent will be required to hire an archaeological contractor that holds a BLM permit in good standing to perform the monitoring, write the treatment plan, carry out the treatment, and prepare all required documentation.

Monitoring will be done as Lands and Realty compliance inspections at intervals determined by program standard operating procedures.

PROTEST/APPEALS: This decision shall take effect immediately upon the date it is signed by the Authorized Officer, and shall remain in effect while any appeal is pending unless the Interior Board of Land Appeals issues a stay (43 CFR 2801.10(b)). Any appeal of this decision must follow the procedures set forth in 43 CFR Part 4. Within 30 days of the decision, a notice of appeal must be filed in the office of the Authorized Officer at the Royal Gorge Field Office, 3028 East Main St., Cañon City, Colorado, 81212. If a statement of reasons for the appeal is not included with the notice, it must be filed with the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of Hearings and Appeals, U.S. Department of the Interior, 801 North Quincy St., Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22203 within 30 days after the notice of appeal is filed with the Authorized Officer.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:

/s/ Keith E. Berger  
Keith E. Berger, Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: 6/29/15

ATTACHMENTS: